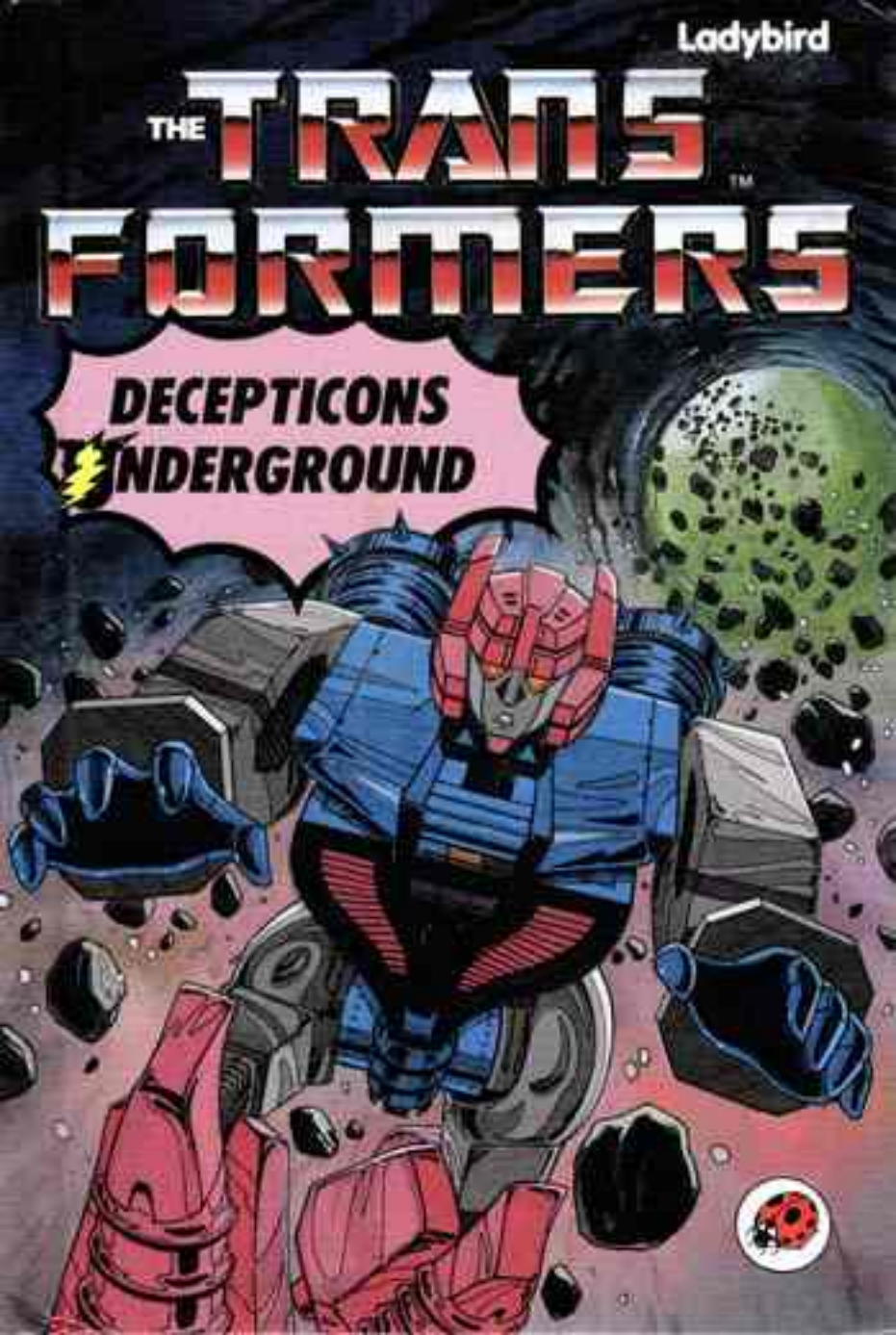
Ladybird

THE TRANSFORMERS™

DECEPTICONS UNDERGROUND



Once, long ago, a race of robot beings called Autobots were forced to wage war against their evil counterparts, the Decepticons, to bring peace back to their home planet Cybertron. When chance brought both sides to Earth, the war went on.

Over many centuries leaders have come and gone. Now the fight continues in a far flung corner of the galaxy, on the planet Nebulos. Both Autobots and Decepticons have formed new alliances, each with a rival group of native Nebulans.

The Decepticons are determined to destroy the Autobots and reign supreme. Will they succeed?

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THE TRANSFORMERS™

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illustrated by GLENN STEWARD

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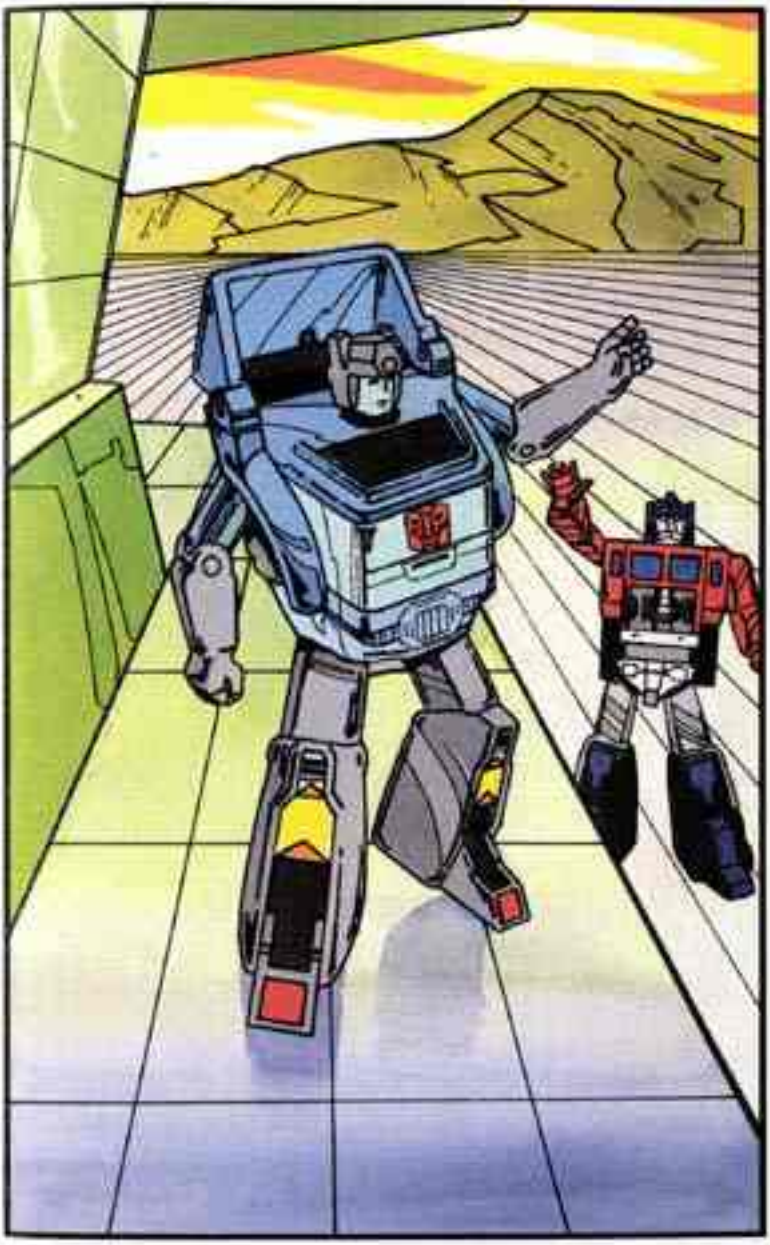
Optimus Prime looked out from the Autobot base. It was quiet and peaceful on Nebulos. Kup came up.

"Funny," he said, "I thought I'd be glad things were so peaceful. But it feels strange. We haven't seen a Decepticon in weeks. Do you think they've left Nebulos?"

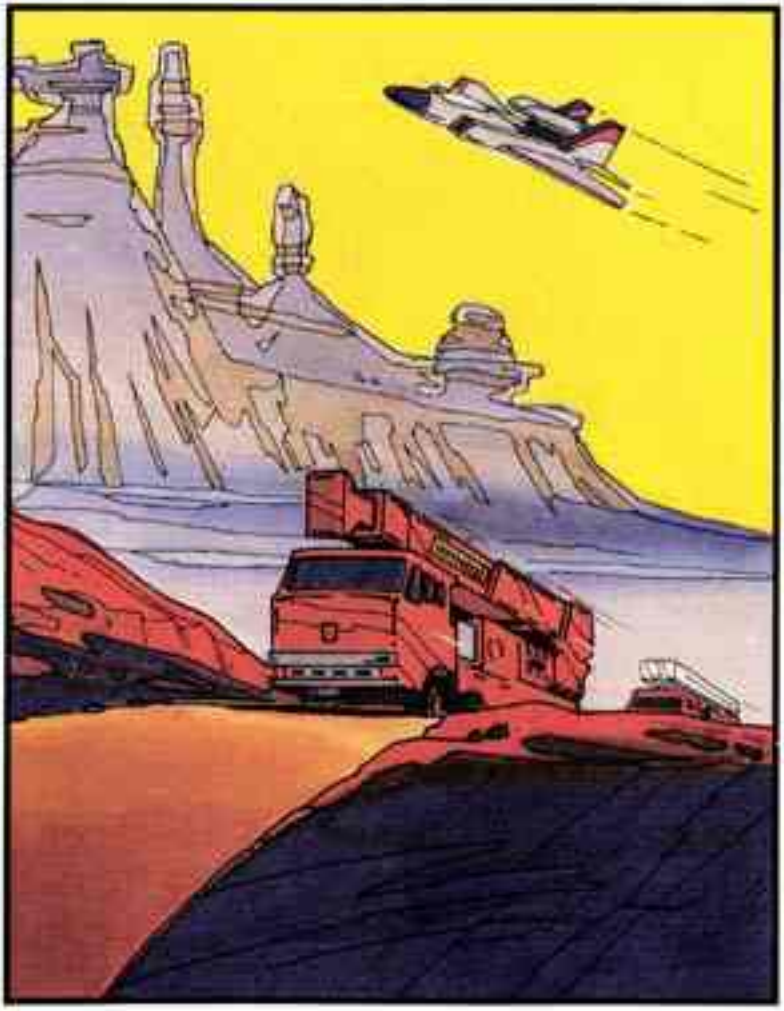
"No," said Optimus Prime. "They are lying low for some reason, I'm sure. The sooner we find out what they are up to the better. Organise a system of long-range patrols."

"Right away," said Kup.



Within the hour, groups of Autobots set off to scour the planet for signs of the Decepticons.

"Leave nothing to chance," ordered Optimus Prime. "Examine every place the Decepticons have ever used as a base or observation post."



Day after day the Autobots searched. They searched hidden mountain valleys. They patrolled along lonely sea shores. They struggled through blinding sandstorms in the burning Nebulan deserts. And they battled against fierce blizzards at the Pole.

Then, one by one, the patrols returned to base to report to Optimus Prime.

As each patrol made its report, Optimus Prime placed a marker on a map of Nebulos. Each marker showed that no Decepticons had been found. Soon, the markers covered almost all of the map.

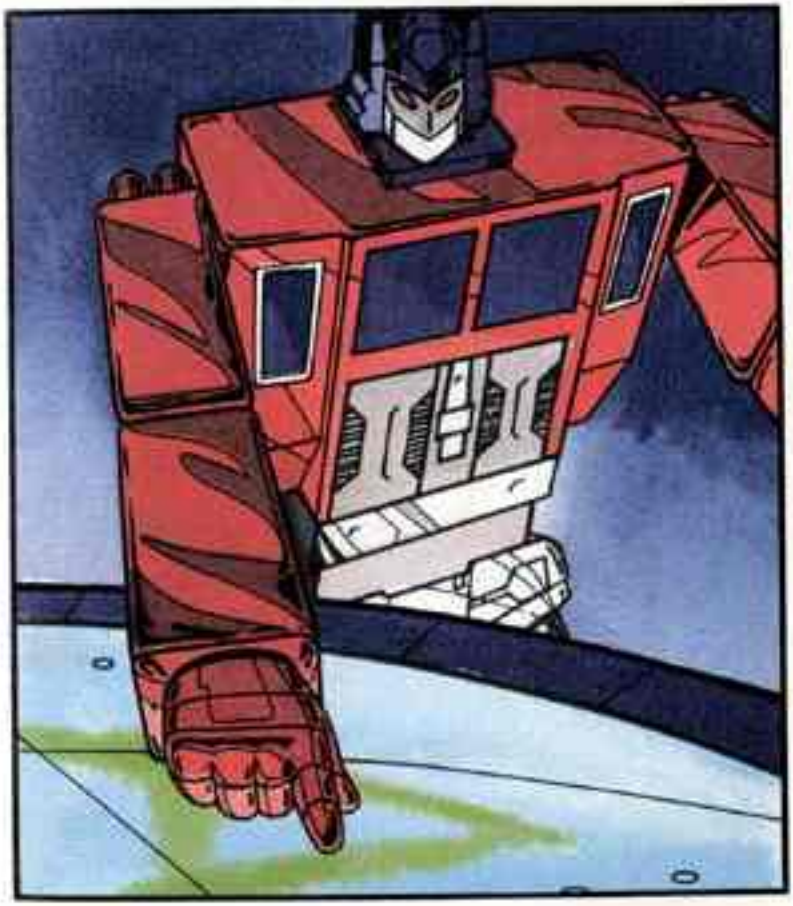
"No sign of Decepticons in the desert," said Highbrow.

"Not a trace at the Pole," reported Brainstorm.

"Nothing but sand and rocks along the sea shore," said Quickswitch.

Optimus Prime looked again at the map. There was one area which none of the patrols had visited.

"No one looked there," he said. "Why?"



"That's the Nebulos Triangle," said Kup. "Nobody goes there any more. Those who once did were never seen again. At least that's what the Nebulans say."

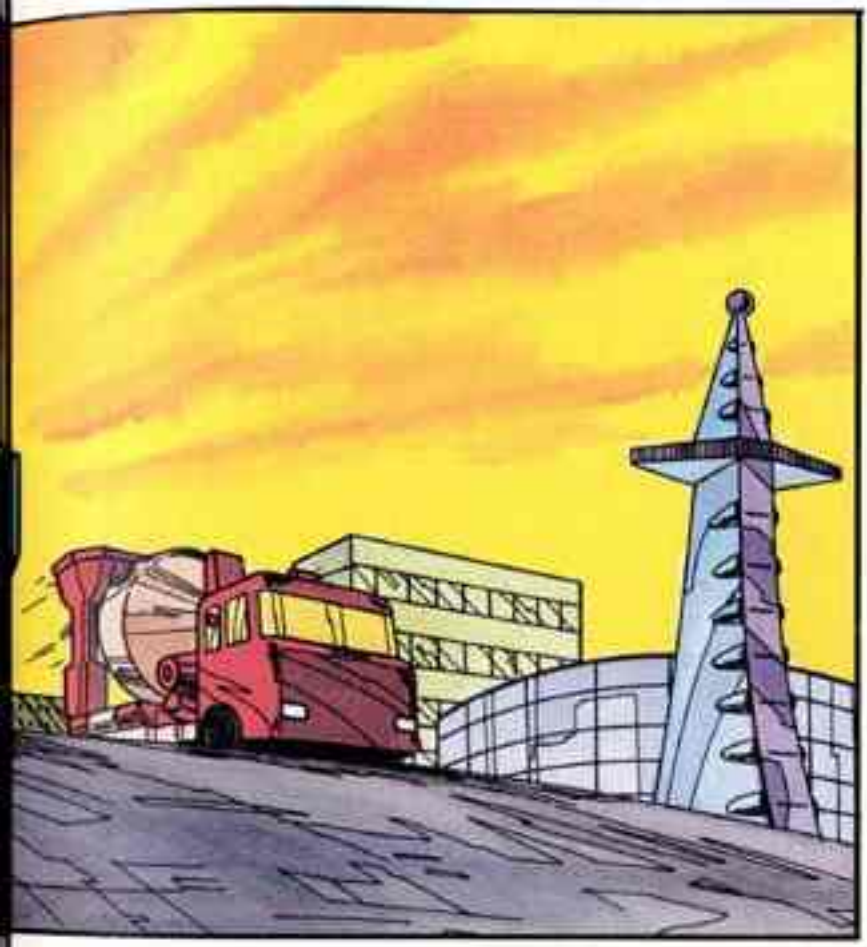
"It's a place of mystery," said Quickswitch. "Navigation is almost impossible. Radar and

compasses go wrong. Electronic systems won't work. Or so I've been told."

"Well, now we'll find out for ourselves," said Optimus Prime. "If the Decepticons are still on the planet, that's where they are hiding out... in the Nebulos Triangle!"

Quickswitch, Scoop and Quickmix formed another patrol and prepared to set out. Their orders were simple.

"Enter the Nebulos Triangle," said the Autobot leader. "Take every precaution. Find out all you can about this sinister place. And, most

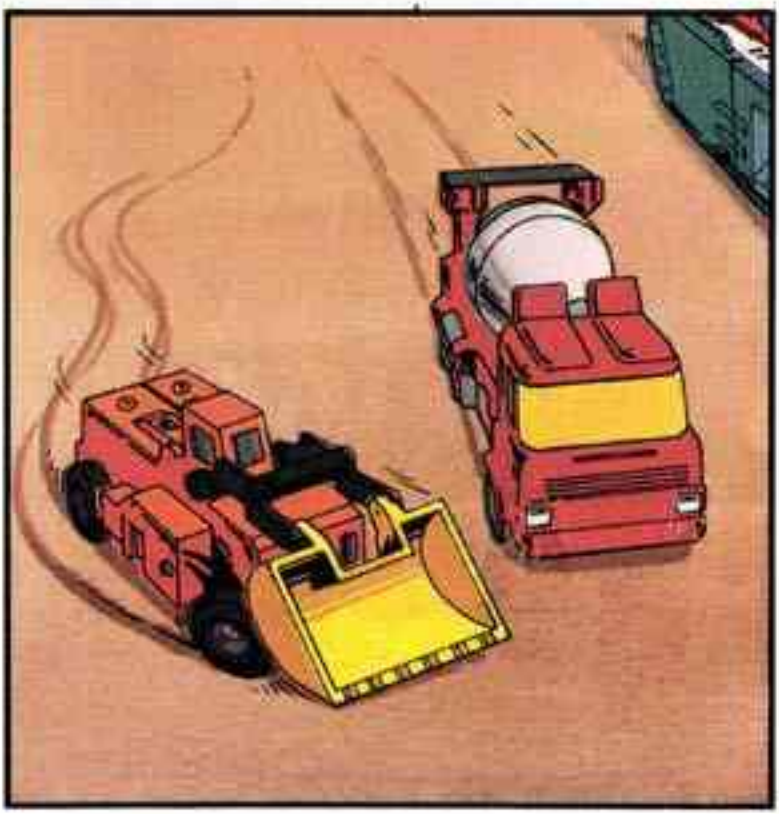


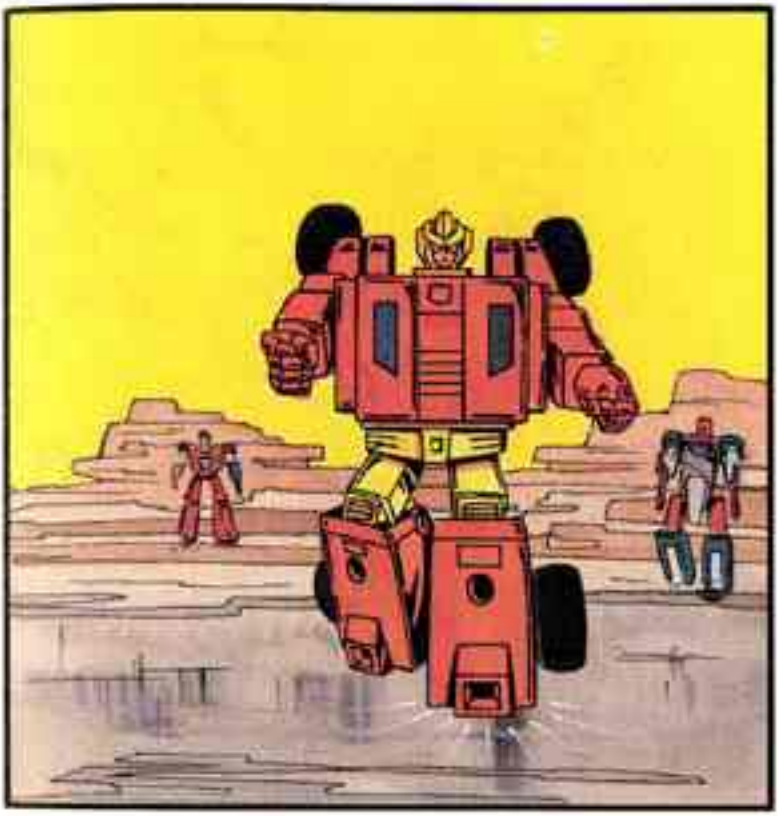
important, watch for any signs that the Decepticons are using the Triangle as a secret base. Good luck."

Led by Quickswitch in his hovercraft mode, Scoop and Quickmix rolled out of the Autobot base and headed for the Nebulos Triangle.

The Autobots knew that they were near the Nebulos Triangle when Quickmix cried, "Hey, what's happening? My electrics have gone mad! Look!" His headlights were flashing on and off by themselves.

"My power steering is acting queer! Look out!" yelled Scoop as he swerved to one side, just missing Quickmix. He braked and transformed to robot mode. The others did likewise. They continued on foot.

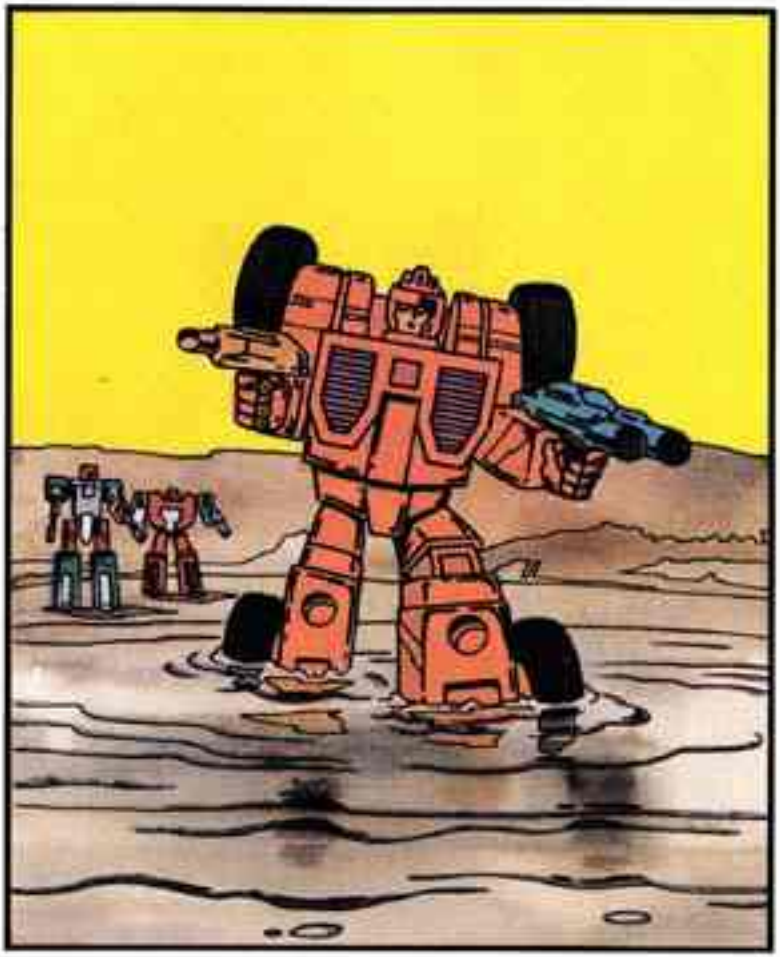




They found it hard to keep their balance. Scanners gave strange readings. Then Scoop stumbled. As his feet clattered on the ground, it gave out a loud ringing sound.

"It's *metal!*" he cried.

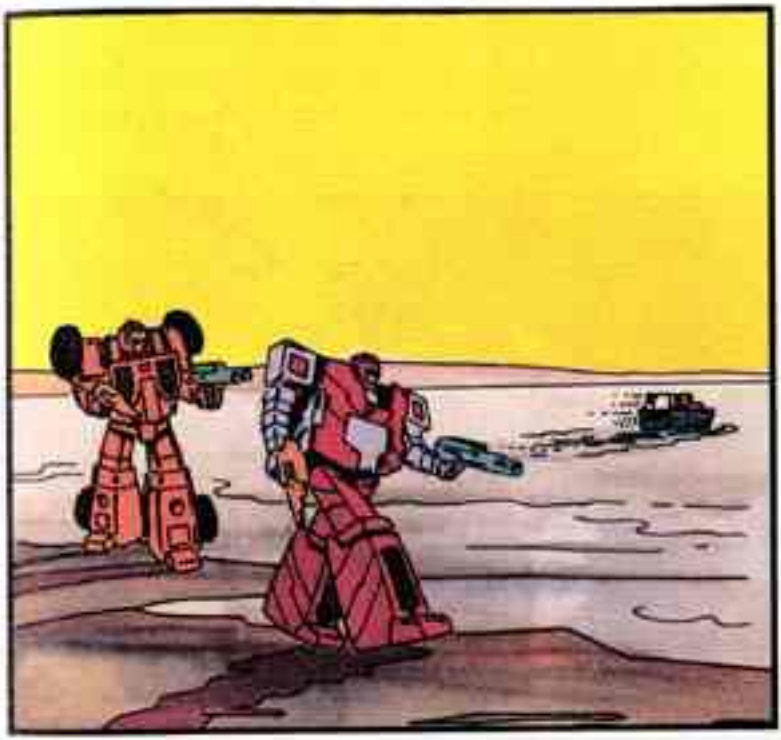
A stream flowed some distance away. "Mercury!" said Quickmix. The mercury stream flowed into a swamp of metallic sludge. Beyond the swamp was a lake of pure mercury.



Scoop took a step towards the lake. His feet sank in the soft sludge. "There's no way across. We'll have to go round," he said.

"I'll meet you guys on the other side," said Quickswitch. And he transformed to his hovercraft mode again.

The others watched as he roared across the quivering surface of the swamp and out across the mercury lake.

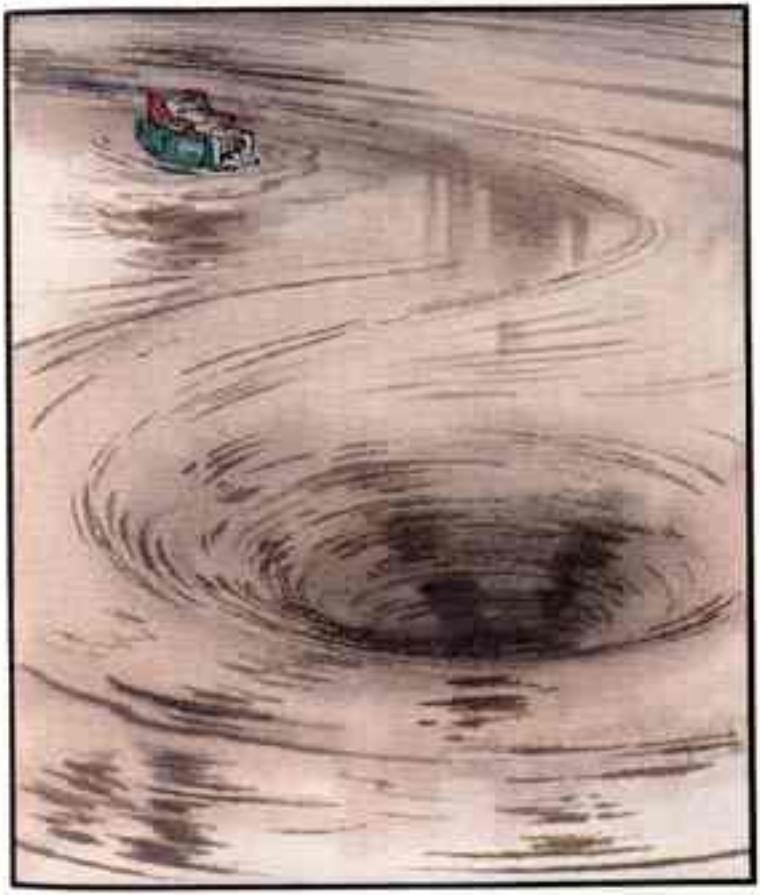


Then they stumbled their way across the strange metal landscape until at last they were walking on ordinary rock. Sensors and electrical systems were working normally again when the two Autobots transformed into their concrete mixer and excavator modes. At top speed they made a wide detour to meet Quickswitch on the far side of the mercury swamp and lake.

Out on the lake, Quickswitch was finding the going difficult. The heavy metal liquid dragged at the skirt of the hovercraft, and he didn't appear to be getting any closer to the farther shore. He switched to boosted power. For a moment it looked as though he was gaining distance. But a glance at the shore showed that he was being

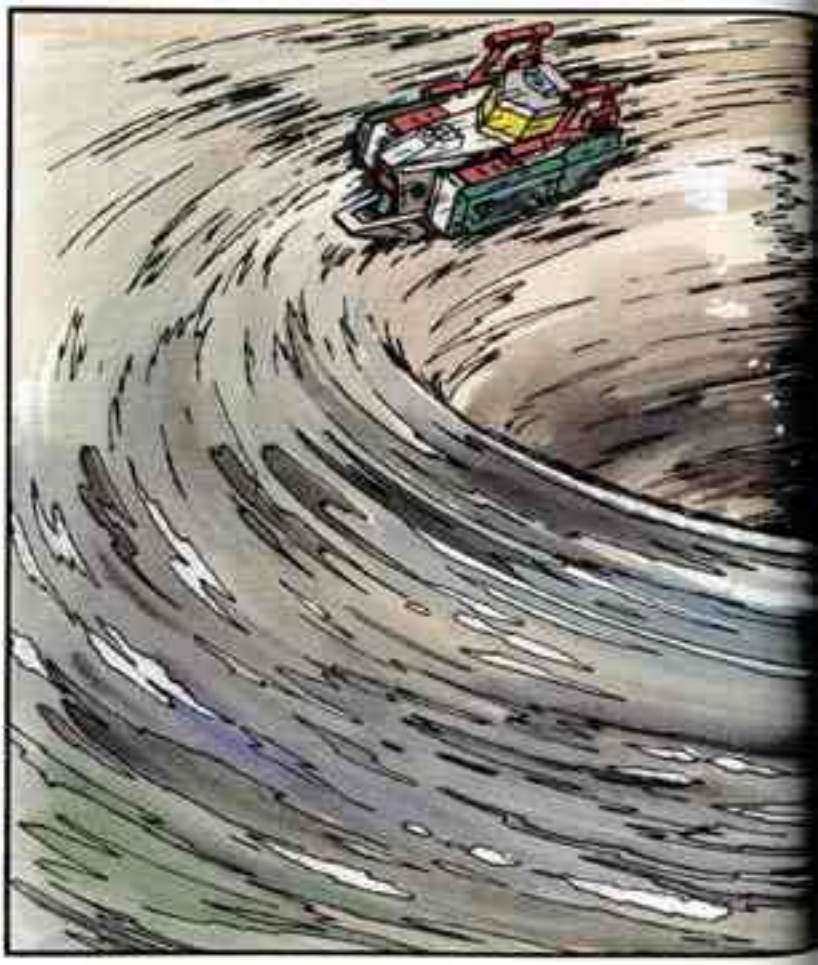
carried sideways! A powerful current was dragging him towards the centre of the lake.

Quickswitch swung round to face back the way he had come. But it was no good. Slowly but surely he was being carried by the swirling mercury towards a dark patch in the midst of the shining surface.



Desperately, Quickswitch tried to transform to his jet fighter plane mode. But his transformer module refused to operate.

Now he could see what the dark patch was. In the centre of the lake, the mercury raced round in a great whirlpool, and he was being drawn



towards it faster and faster. The mercury poured down into the dark centre of the whirlpool. Quickswitch lurched over the edge and down the whirling slope. He made one last effort to transform but then he was sucked, spinning, into the depths of the lake.

The whirling mercury poured through a narrow shaft in the lake bed, taking Quickswitch with it. Suddenly he was clear of the shaft and tumbling end over end in a torrent of falling mercury through the high roof of an underground cavern.

With a great effort, he managed to transform... this time to his puma mode.

"Here's hoping that it's true that cats always land on their feet!" he thought as he twisted round in mid air. Then, with a crash, he hit the floor of the cavern. From high in the rocky, domed roof the mercury fell in a shining cascade. It splashed in a pool at his feet and ran across the floor of the cavern in a broad stream before disappearing into a low opening in the rock wall.

"It's lucky that cats can see in the dark," said Quickswitch to himself as he prowled around the cavern looking for a way out. But there was not a crack through which he could squeeze, and the opening through which the mercury flowed was much too small.

"Nothing for it," he said again to himself. "I'll just have to make my own exit."

He transformed to his drill tank mode, chose a likely spot, and started drilling.

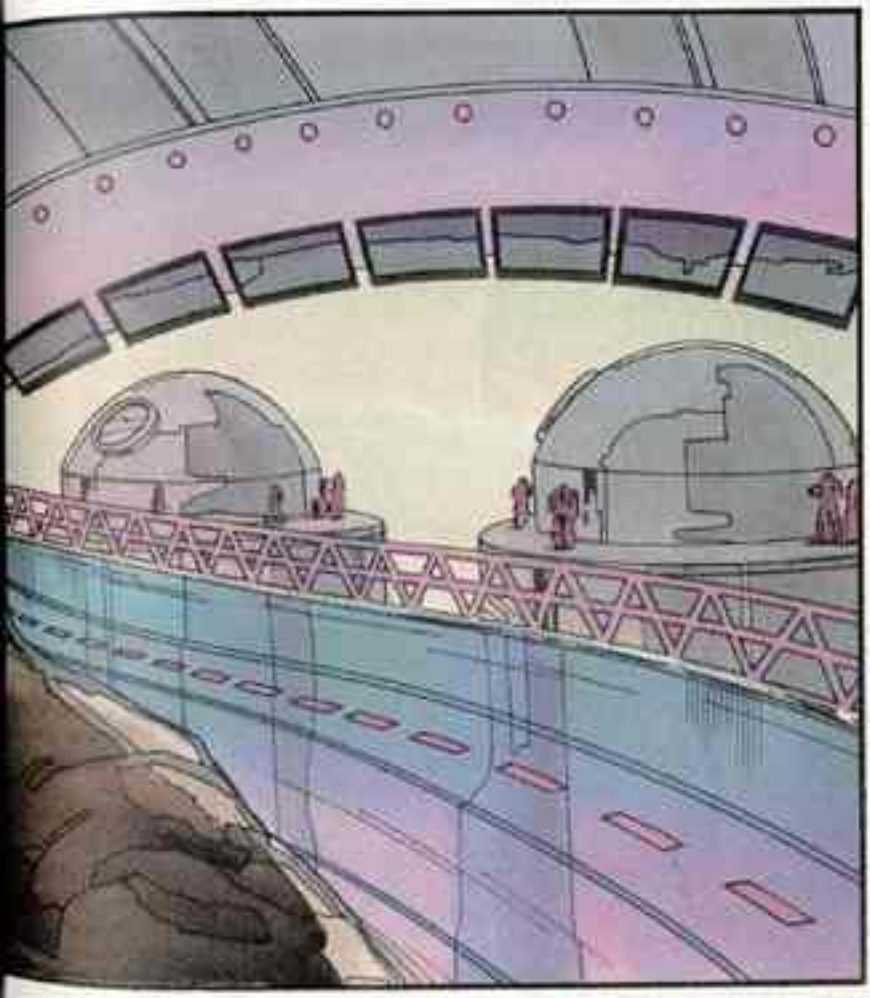
Suddenly he felt his drill break through the rock. He pulled back and light shone from the bore hole. He moved forward at full power. The last of the rock crumbled before the whirling drill... and Quickswitch found himself in a brightly lit tunnel!

"Brightly lit tunnels don't just happen," thought Quickswitch. "I wonder who this belongs to?"

Transforming to robot mode, he crept along the tunnel, keeping to the few patches of shadow. Soon he picked up the hum of machinery. Then there were voices – unpleasantly familiar voices.

Quickswitch crept round one last bend. The tunnel opened into another vast underground cavern. And everywhere he looked there were Decepticons!

"A secret underground base!" he breathed. "The sooner I report back the better."



Quickswitch backed carefully away... but not carefully enough. He bumped against a loose section of the rock wall of the tunnel. A large stone fell to the floor and rolled down the slope towards the cavern. It struck a stack of fuel containers at the cavern entrance, bringing them down with a crash!

Next moment a siren sounded, and from a loudspeaker blared a warning:

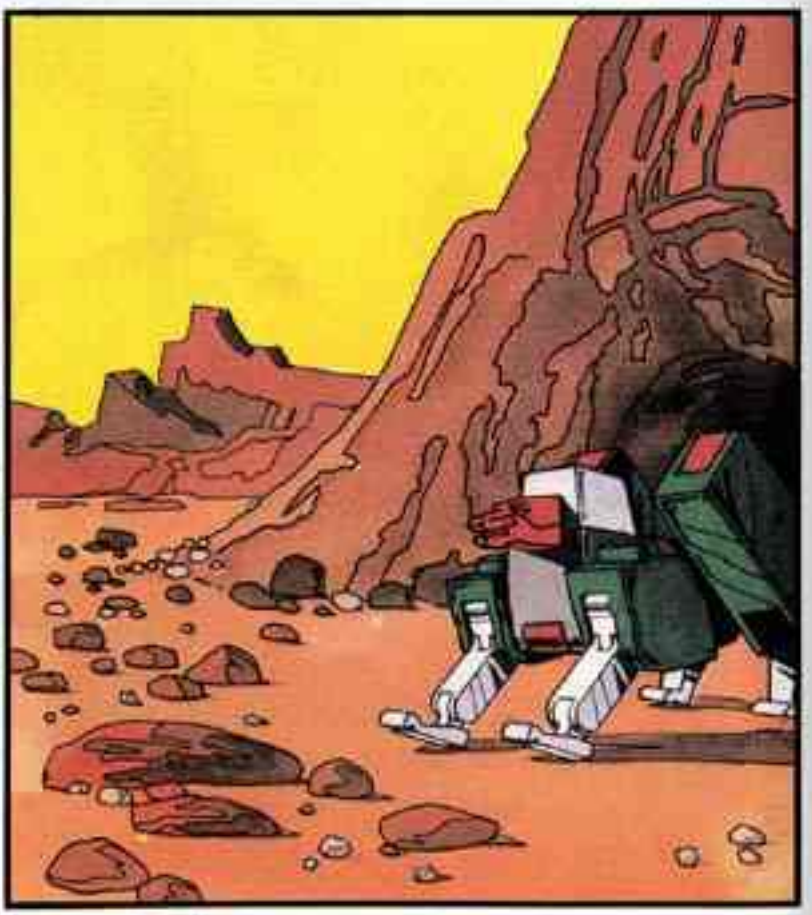
"ALARM! ALARM! INTRUDER! INTRUDER!"

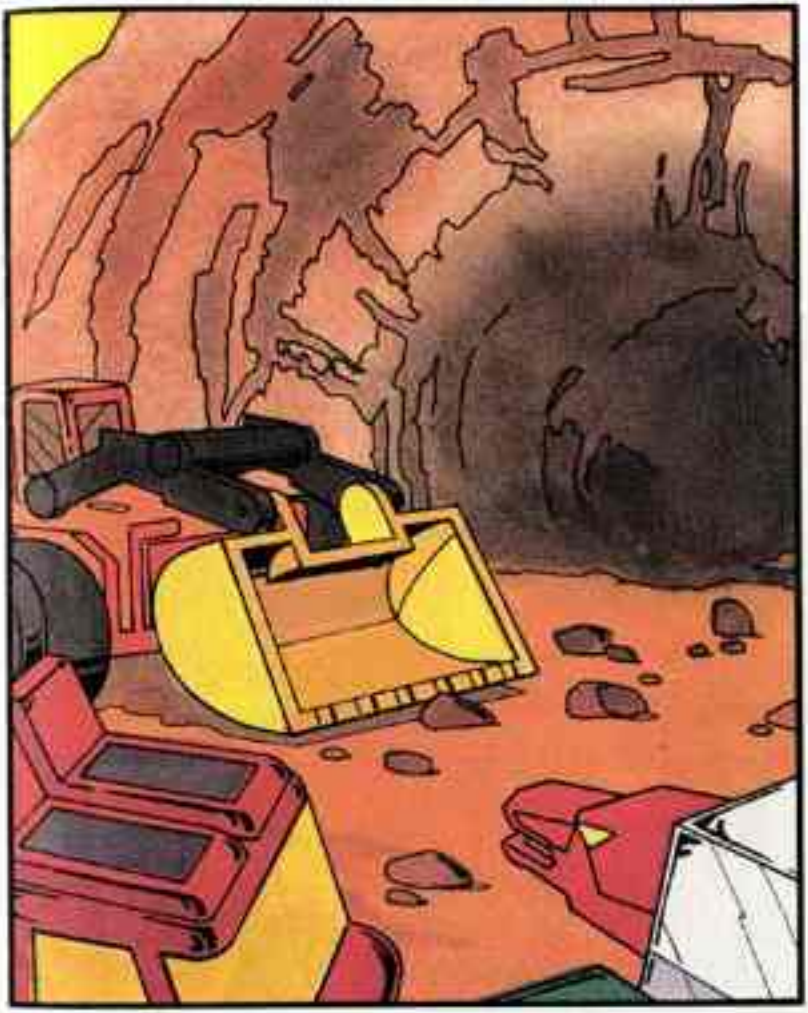
Quickswitch fled.

A long blast from his photon blasters smashed the lighting system in front of him. Transforming once more to puma mode, he raced into the darkness while the Decepticons stumbled in pursuit.

Daylight showed in the distance. Quickswitch bounded up the last few metres of the tunnel and into the open air. He found himself in a desert of rock and stone, sand and gravel.

The sound of the pursuing Decepticons grew louder. But – there was another sound. Engines! Scoop and Quickmix came rolling up in a cloud of dust. They saw Quickswitch.





"You got across," they called.

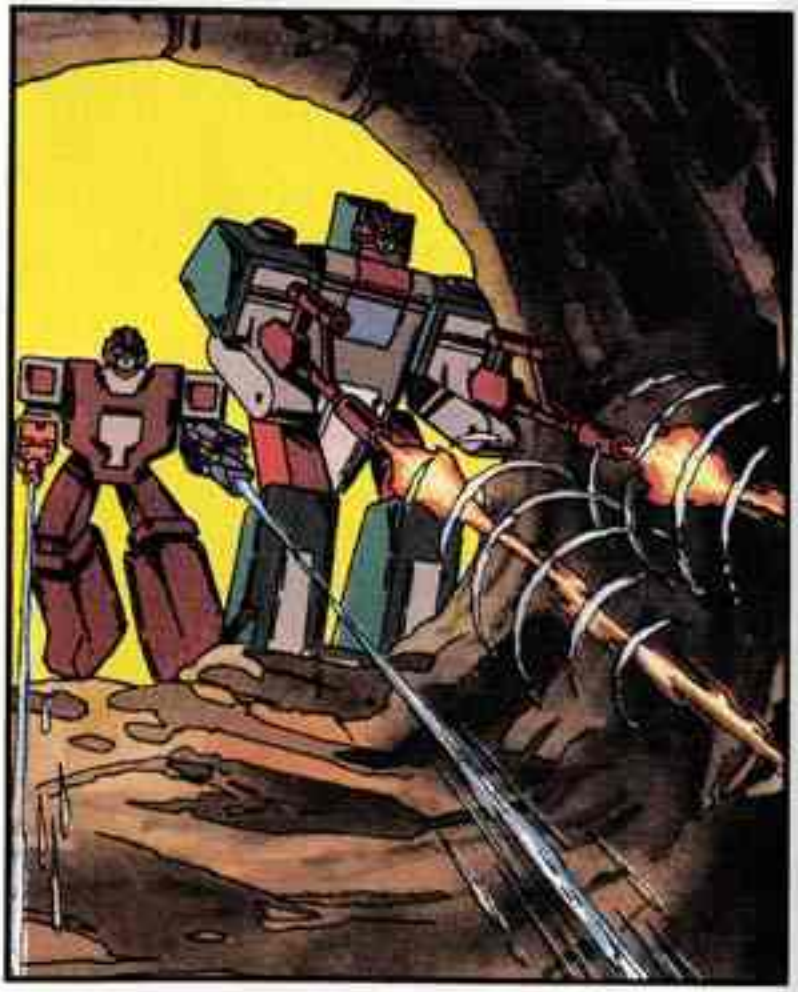
"Yes, and I've found the Decepticons. Or rather, they've found me!"

Scoop drove to the mouth of the tunnel.

"Keep them busy," he said. "I've got an idea."

Quickswitch and Quickmix transformed to robots and took up position at the tunnel mouth. As the Decepticons came in view, they were met by a steady fire from the Autobot weapons.

Meanwhile, Scoop was hard at work. He dug and shovelled as fast as he could. Soon he had



made an enormous pile of rocks and stones. He bulldozed it close to the tunnel.

"Stand clear!" he shouted.

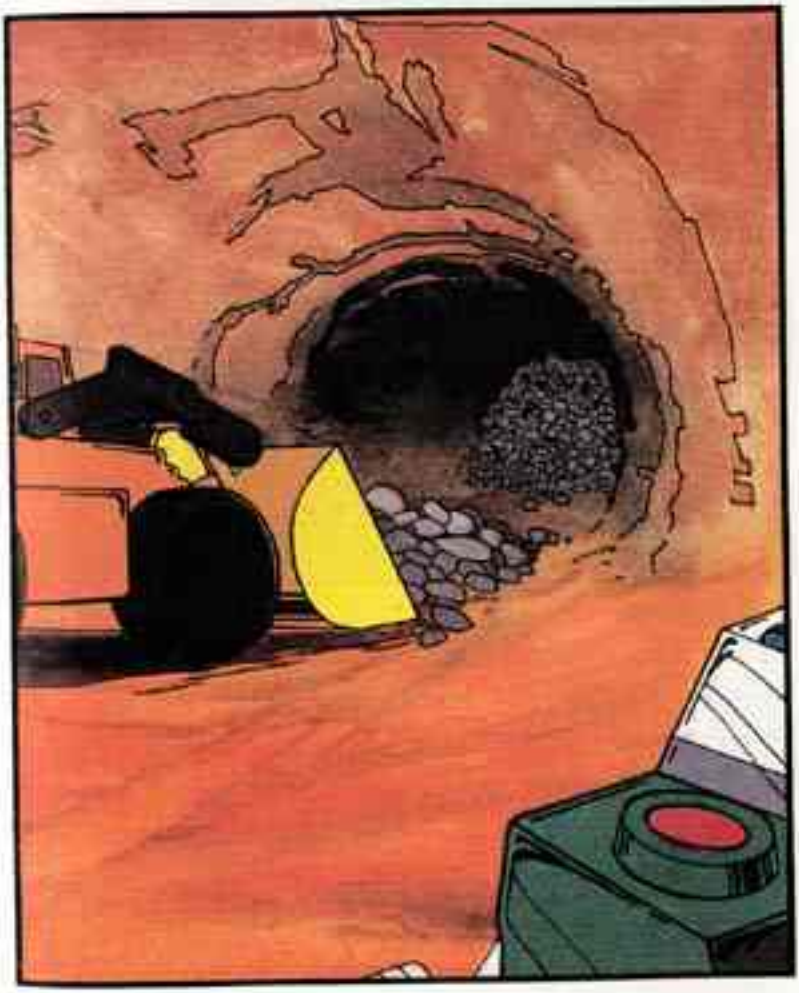
The other two fired a last salvo of shots, then jumped to one side as Scoop sent the pile of rocks and stones into the mouth of the tunnel.

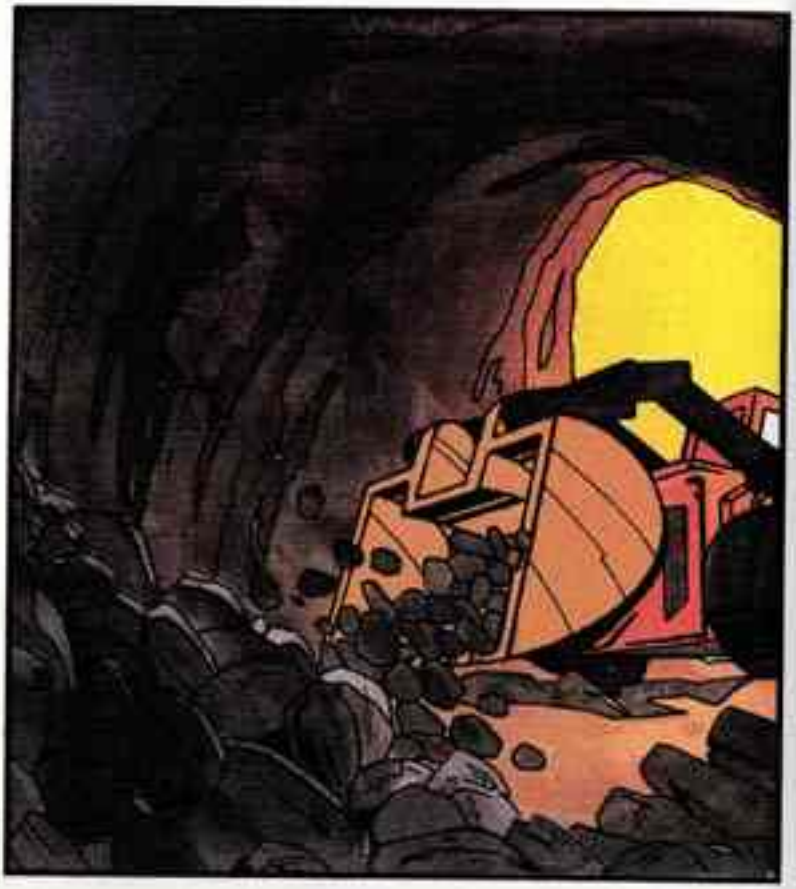
The Decepticons fled as they saw the avalanche of rock rolling towards them. But, after a moment, they started scrambling over the pile that lay across the tunnel.

However, Scoop wasn't finished yet. He pushed another load into the tunnel, this time going forward to pile it on top of the first heap. Again

and again he returned to the surface. And each time he scooped up another load and pushed it down the tunnel.

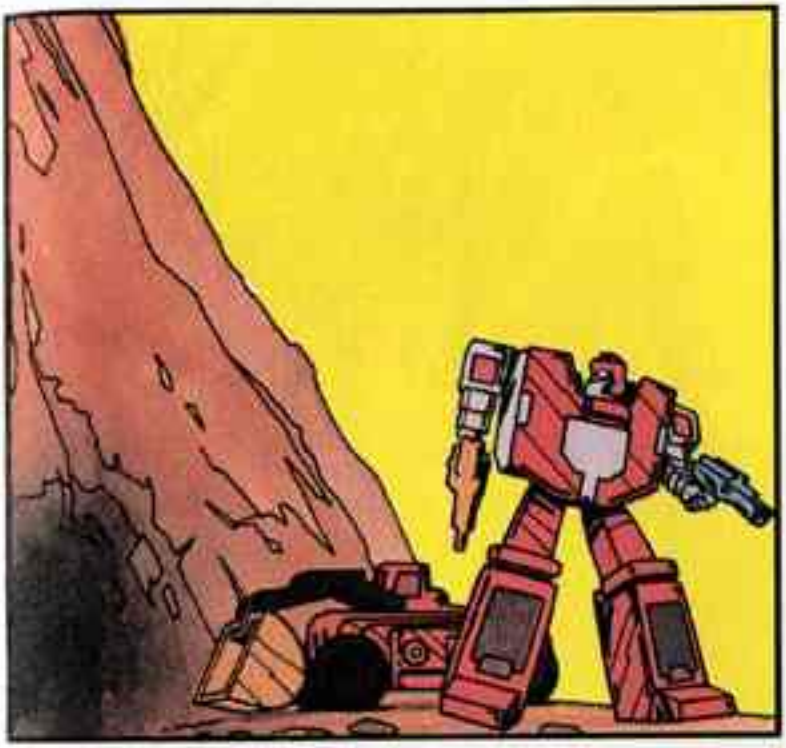
Soon the tunnel was blocked from top to bottom. Faintly, the angry shouts of the Decepticons could be heard on the far side.





"Well done!" cried Quickswitch, as Scoop continued to shovel more and more rocks and boulders into the tunnel. The cries of the Decepticons could no longer be heard. The tunnel was filled up to within three or four metres of the surface.

"That should keep them busy," he panted as he backed out of the tunnel for the last time.



"Hard work never hurt anyone, I've heard," said Quickmix. "I think that I can improve ever so slightly on your plan, Scoop, and give our friends down below something to occupy them for a long time."

He transformed to his concrete mixer mode. "Now," he said, "make me a nice heap of fine sand. Then find as much as you can of that metallic gravel – it's a mineral called Nebulite, and even the Decepticons will find it hard to break through concrete made with Nebulite!"

Quickswitch walked into the tunnel mouth. "The Decepticons are not wasting any time," he said. "I can hear them. A few hours will see them through the barrier."

Scoop and Quickmix said nothing. They were too busy. Scoop shovelled some metallic gravel into Quickmix's drum.

"Another shovel-load should do it," said Quickmix. "Now, the sand."

There was a swish and a gurgle as Quickmix pumped cement and water from his storage tanks into the drum. The drum began to revolve.

"Hurry!" cried Quickswitch.

"You can't rush an operation like this," said Quickmix. "I'm mixing a special rapid-set concrete."

Even as the rock barrier was beginning to shake with the efforts of the Decepticons on the far side, Quickmix backed as far into the tunnel mouth as he could. Slowly, the concrete mixer drum tilted up. Then, with a slurp, the freshly mixed concrete poured out and down the tunnel. Like a slow, grey river it flowed towards the barrier. Slowly, the tunnel filled. Soon, the concrete was halfway up the pile of rocks. It ran

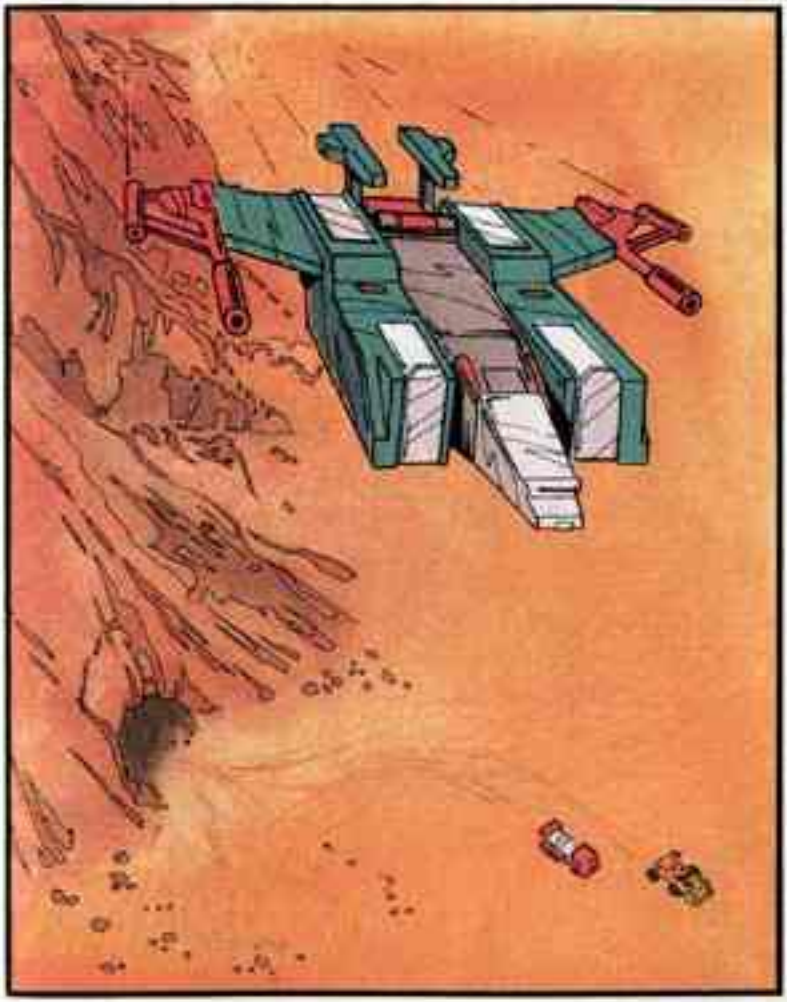
into the spaces. It began to fill up the gaps. The rock barrier disappeared from sight, but Quickmix went on pouring until a level mass of wet concrete stretched from the entrance to meet the roof a short way inside.

Quickswitch touched the concrete with his foot. It was already almost hard.

"There, that should hold them for quite some time," he said.

"Brilliant!" cried Scoop and Quickswitch together.

"One last thing," said Quickmix, "would you guys couple up the hose and wash my drum out before I transform? Hard concrete is most unpleasant."

"That's what the Decepticons are probably thinking right now," said Quickswitch, as he hosed out Quickmix's drum.

Then he transformed to his jet mode and set off with his comrades to report to Optimus Prime.